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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002348

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/10/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [IS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [TU](#) [IO](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: SYRIAN FM'S VISIT OVERSHADOWED BY AIRSPACE VIOLATION

REF: A. ANKARA 246

[1](#)B. ANKARA 2307

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and Comment: Israeli jets' September 6 violation of Syrian and Turkish airspace overshadowed Syrian FM Mouallem's previously scheduled visit. Calling on Israel to provide an explanation, FM Babacan simultaneously urged all parties to show restraint for the sake of regional stability. With the exception of the incident, the substance of Mouallem's meetings showed little variation from other recent high-level GOT-SARG discussions. The MFA reported that Mouallem did appear more receptive to compromise regarding Lebanon than during previous talks. The GOT has shown a great deal of restraint and responsibility in their public statements regarding the Israeli airspace violations. Barring any additional incidents, the GOT seems willing to let this one pass without exacerbating an already tense situation. End Summary and Comment.

[1](#)2. (C) On September 9, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Mouallem visited Ankara for a series of high-level meetings with PM Erdogan, President Gul, and FM Babacan. Despite press speculation that the trip was prompted by September 6 reports of Israeli warplanes violating Syrian airspace, MFA officials noted that Mouallem had previously requested the visit in order to extend election congratulations to Erdogan and Gul on behalf of the Asad government. During his meetings, Mouallem discussed Iraq, Lebanon, the Middle East peace process and bilateral issues, in addition to the alleged airspace violation. According to MFA Syria desk officer Cem Ulusoy, the substance of the meetings were little changed from Mouallem's February visit, which focused primarily on maintaining regional stability (REF A).

AIRSPACE VIOLATION

[1](#)3. (C) Ulusoy confirmed media reports that the GOT had found jettisoned Israeli F-15 fuel tanks near the Syrian border on September 6 (REF B). The Turks have formally expressed dissatisfaction to the Israelis and requested an explanation, to which Israel has yet to provide a concrete response as far as we are aware. The MFA subsequently released a statement expressing concern over the incident and advocating that both Israel and Syria avoid taking actions that would escalate tensions. Babacan urged Mouallem to show restraint for the sake of regional harmony. Ulusoy reported that, contrary to media speculation, Mouallem did not request Turkey's assistance in resolving the matter. Babacan repeated his temperance message during a joint press conference, adding that Israeli violation of Syrian and Turkish airspace was

"unacceptable." Mouallem condemned the incident as "an open indicator that Israel never wants peace."

MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

¶4. (C) According to Ulusoy, Mouallem discussed the inclusion of Syria and Turkey in the proposed November Middle East peace process conference. Ulusoy noted that both countries advocate using all possible tracks to achieve a "well-prepared meeting with concrete results." (Selling itself as a neutral party trusted by all sides, the GOT has repeatedly lobbied the Israel and Quartet members for Turkish participation in November's meeting.)

LEBANON

¶5. (C) GOT officials encouraged the SARG to play a constructive role in Lebanon for the sake of regional stability. Ulusoy shared that Mouallem seemed more realistic than in previous meetings regarding Lebanon, more inclined to understand the importance of compromise and reaching a common position. Mouallem remarked to Babacan that he believes the Lebanese presidential election will be a positive turning point.

IRAQ

¶6. (C) On the topic of Iraq, Mouallem told Turkish officials that the ever increasing number of Iraqi refugees residing in Syria, currently 1.5 million, are becoming an overwhelming financial burden. Not living in camps, the refugees are dispersed through the country, making administration additionally difficult. Mouallem added that he would raise the issue at the neighbors meeting in Istanbul October 31-November 1 and request additional international

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assistance. The GOT pledged to explore alternative sources of funding, either bilaterally or through international organizations, in addition to the USD 1 million donated to UNHCR for Iraqi refugees in general and USD 500,000 previously pledged to Syria specifically. Ulusoy added that Mouallem shares Turkey's views on the importance of maintaining a unified Iraq.

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